

BREAKOUT SESSION REPORTS

Representatives from each of the six groups briefly shared key points from their discussion.

Scientific Understanding

Hal Zenick reported for work group chair Kevin Teichman that many of the topics discussed in the Scientific Understanding breakout session could fit within a variety of other work groups, and that two unmet needs were selected as major points for this group:

Unmet Needs

- Re-examining the risk assessment paradigm and tying it better into the decision making process
 - Decisions that need to be made and the data needed for decision making both need to be considered.
 - This is a cross-cutting issue – need to look at community-based risk, individual risk, population risk, and global risk (although the global aspect didn't really make its way into the discussion).
 - Consider issues of mixtures and factors that drive vulnerability of populations and susceptibility of individuals.
 - Take advantage of new modeling, science, and mindsets.
 - In many cases there is a greater need for technical support; upfront communication (including communication of limitations) is advised.
 - Examination of the risk assessment paradigm can begin now.
- Data mining
 - We need to look at existing datasets to take better advantage of what we already have and to determine how data can be better integrated (e.g. IRIS and ToxProfiles).
 - Consider medical, hospital, and other health oriented databases where there is a weighing of confidentiality versus the greater good of getting this information out.

Education and Communication

Nsedu Obot Witherspoon, project co-chair, substituted for work group chair Kathy Rest and reported that the group split up into two sub-groups. The sub-groups discussed issues pertaining to professional education and public communication, and then participants reconvened for a conversation among the entire breakout group.

Professional Education – Unmet Needs

- Integration of environmental health into health professional curricula
- Environmental health as a core component of professional development for multiple disciplines

Professional Education – Possible Solutions

- Establishment of a clearinghouse or repository of resources and an inventory of effective models of practice; identify a non-polarizing organization to manage this clearinghouse
- Create venues for dialogue that are action oriented and results producing

Public Communication

- Public participation in the process is vital from the beginning

- Acknowledgment of educational opportunities from the community level (education from the bottom up and from the top down are both important in building trust)
- Coordinating effort of all parties in addressing the issues; developing consistent messages based on effective audience research, with a better understanding of uncertainty and developing best practices
- Err on the side of caution and provide any information and alternatives when possible to protect public health; when there is uncertainty, telling people what we do know is better than saying nothing at all.

Monitoring

John Balbus reported that this group looked at data collection, integration and analysis, and communication issues for four chemical areas: chemical use and release, environmental monitoring, biomonitoring, and health outcomes.

Unmet Needs

- A data system that is set up with the goal of promoting public health
 - While a tremendous amount of data is collected, the systems are fragmented and many are unable to meet the needs of stakeholders, whether the stakeholders are states unable to get biomonitoring data out of NHANES or communities that aren't getting relevant health outcome or environmental monitoring data.
- Public access to data
 - Many types of data collected are incompatible with other databases or have restricted access due to proprietary information, legal reasons, or interpretation difficulties.

Possible Solution

- Create a comprehensive inventory of the data being collected in these four areas, including information on if/how existing data can be accessed and a description of issues of data compatibility

Serving Communities

Peggy Shepard reported the major points of the Serving Communities breakout group discussion.

Unmet Needs

- Trust: We cannot begin this conversation without building trust.
- Federal agencies must acknowledge past mistakes and flawed studies, and must consider their capacity to meet communities' needs (must ask whether the Agency's mandate needs to be revised, etc.)
- Peer review of health assessments

Solutions

- Develop a collaborative inter-agency focus to address legacy pollution as well as current community conditions
 - Should include health and housing issues, built environment
- Site visits, particularly where community does not have confidence in health assessments that have been conducted
- Development of independent ATSDR database and testing
- Funding community collaborations for independent community testing and capacity building

Chemical Emergencies

Andrea Kidd Taylor reported two unmet needs, one possible solution, and one additional point from the Chemical Emergencies breakout group discussion.

Unmet Needs

- Better emergency preparedness, awareness, and response architecture
 - Drills
 - Community right to know and understand hazards they are being exposed to
 - Responder, receiver, and healthcare provider education
 - Better communication
 - Coordination between federal, state, and local agencies
 - Eliminate duplication
 - Training for workers, responders, community residents
 - Resource equity and capacity building; tools and technology
- Prevention
 - Alternative technology assessments
 - Less hazardous alternatives to hazardous materials used
 - Better systems for data collection and sharing
 - Better policies
 - Corporate responsibility and buy-in

Solution

- Unified approach to two major categories of unmet needs, particularly coordination

Additional Thought

- We need to be sure we are clear on the audience for this discussion.

Policies and Practices

Tom Burke reported that this group indicated an interest in focusing more on preventing exposures than just reducing them.

Unmet Needs

- Emphasis on prevention; need to discuss burden of proof and precaution
- Engage communities in decision-making in a meaningful way
- Need to coordinate agencies at every level (e.g. definition of “safe” in different agencies)
- Need to include occupational health
- Good, accessible information on hazards, chemical use and emissions, exposures, and health effects at the local level

Solutions

- Visible coordinator in every state
- Cross-agency coordination of children’s environmental health